Nicole-Hey everybody. And welcome back to the podcast. I have a co-host today. Jenny, you guys have heard it before, but today she's coming on to talk all about self-care, but in case you don't know who she is, I'm going to let her introduce herself now.

Jenny-Hi, Nicole. Thanks so much for having me, like you said, my name is Jenny. Um, you can find me on Instagram at little learners. big feelings. I am a K to five emotional support teacher. So I teach a self-contained special ed classroom for students with severe behaviors. And, um, I am also in my coursework now to get a master's in applied behavior analysis. And like I said, you can find me on Instagram, where I'm just being my goofy, relatable behavior teacher self.

Nicole-And you definitely want to go check out her reels because they are the best, but we're going to dive into self-care today. And I know there's a lot of talk about self care, but it's easy to talk about it, hard to apply it. And so the first thing I wanted to talk about is I think a lot of people assume that self care is taking a bubble bath or drinking a glass of wine or painting your nails. And they're like, why don't you do those things? And so can you explain a little bit more about what we mean when we say self care? Like what that truly means and why it is so necessary?

Jenny- Yeah, so like bubble baths and glasses of wine, like those can be self care, but they're definitely not it by any means. And the term self-care is often misconstrued. Um, but when you really break it down, it's what it sounds like it is taking care of yourself. And I always compare it to, um, like how would you care for a child or how would you care for a pet? And you'd make sure that they have food, that they have someplace to sleep. That they're going to bed on time and getting enough sleep, that they don't have too much screen time, or that they're going out on walks. If it's a, a dog that you were taking care of or, um, even having toys and things that they enjoy playing with. Like if you have a child in your life that you care about and they really like Barbies, you might not buy them a dump truck.

And so when you consider how you would take care of those that need you, um, in whatever way in your life, that that might be self care is really no different. It's just applying those principles to yourself. So recognizing and meeting your own needs. And I often compare this for the teacher nerds out there with like Maslow's hierarchy of needs and that you have to have those base, like physiological needs things like making sure you're eating enough, sleeping enough, drinking enough water, um, then kind of moving up on that hierarchy, making sure that you're organized, that you're taking good care of like your time and your finances, then moving up into relationships. Do you have friendships? Like cultivating friendship can be a form of self-care if that's something that you need and that you're giving to yourself and then, um, you know, working your way up until you reach that pinnacle on the triangle diagram, we're so familiar with, of like meeting your fullest potential.

And that's really what self-care is about for me is giving myself what I need to be the best version of self of myself that I can be. And you know, why is it so necessary to me? That's why, like, we want to bring our best selves to our relationships, to our family, to our friends, to our jobs, whether that's in a classroom or in a clinic or elsewhere. Um, and then there's also all of like the mental health implications of when you don't meet those needs and you don't take care of yourself, bad things happen. Um, and you aren't able to show up in your life and you aren't able to live your best life that you could. If you were taking care of yourself, be proactive,

Nicole-As you talked about that, a visual popped into my mind that I feel at first, you're going to be like, seriously, but this is for all of my nineties kids out there, Jenny, you're a little bit younger than me. So I don't know if he did the same things as a kid, but did you ever play the Sims video game?

Jenny- Yes. So yes, I was like right at like the cusp right at the end of that

Nicole-I was like in the generation that you played Sims, like all the time. And so as you're talking, I'm like, well, yeah, my sims character, if I didn't feed him and I didn't like have pictures on the wall, he would like fall on the floor. Like that's, that was like a very real life example that I didn't pick up. And I probably should have, because I would have done easier, but just tried to live my own life the way I've tried to make my SIM live their life. So any nineties kid, hopefully that gives another visual of like, why you truly have to do all of these.

Jenny-I love that you said that

Nicole-At the beginning, we said that bubble baths can be Self care, but it's not necessarily self-care. But the important thing to pull away from that is self-care is not the same for everybody. So what Jenny does for self-care and what I do for self care are probably different. And so a lot of people encourage me to exercise. I have an anxiety disorder and a lot of people say like, Oh, exercise will help that. That's not really self-care for me, it's important for me, but that doesn't help me the way some of my other techniques help me. So just because something works for somebody else doesn't mean it's going to be effective for you. So can we talk about how we know that whatever activity we've chosen is actually serving that self-care need?

Jenny-Yeah, totally. And I think one thing that's also important to recognize is that self-care might change over time. You know, like I think back to when I was first teaching and I was still living at my parents and for me self-care was making sure I was prepared for the next day. Whereas now my self care is making sure I don't work in the evening. Um, and, and how that changes. But I think you really have to focus on learning what your healthy self feels like versus what your self feels like. And then kind of picking up on those clues for yourself of, um, you know, what, what did I do before I felt my best. Um, and what kinds of things are kind of those trends in like my habits and routines, um, and take the time when you have the time, whether it's like spring break or summer or around the holidays to just explore different things that are interesting, that might sound like something you'd enjoy that. Just feel good, whether it's a new, um, a new hobby or even just like a new organizational strategy.

 Like for me right now, I just got a different planner because the one before wasn't feeding myself care. Um, and there's a lot of good books on like learning what things feel good to you in terms of like, what things you enjoy and what are interested, what add and cultivate your life. Um, I wrote down a few that I've read. I don't know if you've read any of these or any similar, um, big magic by Elizabeth Gilbert was one that really helped me explore. Like these are things that are unique to me that I enjoy. Um, the happiness project by Gretchen Rubin was a huge one for me in my own self care journey. And then, um, flow by, I honestly, can't, I'm going to try to pronounce the author's name.

He's from Europe. I think it's Millay, Schurmanns,, something along those lines. You know what I'm talking about? Like reading books about like flow or about creativity or about happiness, um, really gives you a lot of ideas that you can then explore. Um, and I also found for me, it really helps to talk with people who are close to me, whether that's like my friends or, um, my family or my partner, like my husband told me, he's like, I can tell you're in a good head space and you've been taking good care of yourself because you're singing as you walk around the house. And if you follow me on Instagram, you'll notice that sometimes I sing as I'm working in my classroom. And, um, and so that's like one of my things and I'm like, okay, that's something that is just a natural by-product of taking care of myself. And so then when I'm maybe down in the dumps, I'll purposely say like, I'm going to put on some music, that's going to make me want to sing. Cause I know it makes me feel better. Um, and this is going to sound weird, but I think data can be really important for us in like collecting data on ourselves. I did this, I felt this, I didn't do this. I felt this. Um, and that can really just help you notice things that you might not pick up on as you're just going through your daily life. Um, I've done that through apps like, good habits. That's my favorite app for like habit tracking. There's another one called daily mood journal. That's really good. Um, you can also do like pencil paper journals. You can build it into your planner or like a bullet journal. Um, but data is oddly enough, something that really taught me a lot about what self care works best for me,

Nicole-I'm totally here for the data

Jenny-I knew you would be.

Nicole-And just like another example, um, exactly what you're saying. If no one will see the video from this, uh, interview, but if you saw me right now, you would see that I have makeup on and I'm dressed, even though I'm working from home. I took data on myself and realized when I just like rolled out of bed and I stayed in my pajamas. I didn't feel good that day. And like so many people like love like lounging around in sweat pants. It's a very like normal thing to do. So I really had to track and realize like that there's a correlation. Every single time I didn't get dressed up. I also had a bad day. So I made the shift just every morning, changing my clothes, putting on some makeup. And that has really helped.

There are a lot of people that that would not help. So I'm not going out and telling everybody, go put on makeup. I'm saying, figure out what that thing is for you that you need. And going back to the exercise, I really don't care if I don't exercise for three weeks. I don't see a big shift in myself. That's why it's not great. Self-care for me. But I do see a big shift if I maybe eat out for three weeks instead of cooking meals, because cooking meals is another thing that I do that really works well for myself care. And one thing we wanted to talk about is when you are implementing, self-care ideally it's an antecedent strategy. So it's something that you already have built into your schedule. If you're waiting until you're already in a crisis and then you try and do self-care, it's not nearly effective and it's not going to work the way you want to do it. It's something that you have to be doing on a regular basis. So can we talk a little bit more about why that is an antecedent strategy?

Jenny- Yeah. And I love the connections between this and behavior in general, whether it's the taking that on yourself or antecedent strategies, because that's really what all of this is as we're taking care of ourselves or as we're not taking care of ourselves it's behavior. Um, and so I think, um, you know, I think to how I teach my own students with like emotional regulation in my classroom and I tell them to look for signals, right? So I might not be at, you know, this red zone level 10 trashing the room, but I'm putting my head down. So that means some of those frustration things are starting inside me. And how can I intervene now before it gets to that point? Um, so I think it's important to look at our own signals, things like fatigue or irritability or not being as interested or as excited in things or people that we were before.

Just, just having an off day and rather than saying, okay, it's an off day. It's no big deal saying this is an off day. I'm going to do something about it before I have 10 off days in a row and we have a problem here.

Nicole-Exactly.

Jenny- You know? Um, but also with that idea of particularly with, um, like the apps or the journaling that I was talking about, I found for me that as I built that into my routines, it became a habit. So building positive, healthy habits that you just start to naturally do. I know for myself that has been a game changer for me in my own self care. Um, things like every Sunday night I put technology away at seven o'clock. I take a bubble bath, I paint my nails and I go to sleep and that might not work for everybody, but it's built into my routine now, so that I'm starting my week with self care rather than coming home on Monday, feeling drained already after one day only. And, um, just feeling like we're always catching up, if that makes sense.

Nicole-And Jenny, I didn't tell you, I was going to talk about this in the interview, but one thing I want to point out for anybody listening is we're not saying by doing self care, it's going to take away all your problems. So it's not like if you're doing a self-care activity every single night, you're never going to have bad days. What we're saying is that if you do self-care those bad days, over time become a little bit easier to manage and bounce back from. So there's a distinction there, cause I don't want anyone to gain where does being like sunshine and rainbows and be like, your bubble bath will cure your week and you'll, you'll just be golden. So give it a try.

Jenny-No, no. And, and what's funny about that specifically is part of the reason I started doing that on Sunday nights is because the whole Sunday scaries thing is, is real. It's really real. Um, and Monday mornings in my type of a classroom setting are always difficult. And so I'm one of the hardest things about my job personally. And it's actually funny that you bring this up because I was hoping to touch on this a little bit too. Is that like as a behavior professional, me being in a better head space doesn't mean my kid's not going to swear at me that day. It doesn't mean my kid's not going to throw chairs. It doesn't mean my kid's not going to have a hard time. It doesn't mean all of my students are going to get all of their points on their point sheets the next day, because I took a bubble bath the night before, not at all what it does. It puts me myself in a better head space to respond to those things healthfully. And a lot of my self care came out of a lot of time in therapy to like talk to other people, get, you know, professional advice if you need to. Um, cause it doesn't make the bad stuff go away. It just builds up your resilience. I often talk about it like, um, like stress is like a metabolism and some people can eat a ton of chocolate bars and never gained weight. And some people can experience a ton of stress and never feel stressed out. I am not one of those people. So my self care is almost like my mental exercise to keep my brain in shape and my brain healthy and resilient for when those stressors do come up in life because they will

Nicole- Exactly. Is there anything else that you wanted to touch on in this podcast talking about self care?

Jenny-Yeah. Well, I, I touched on it a teeny bit, but I think this is particularly important. Um, for those of us who do experience challenging behaviors, whether it's in a clinical setting or in a classroom setting, um, there's a bit of almost trauma that comes along with some of the behaviors that we might experience. And so if anybody ever wants to reach out to me and talk more about that specifically by all means, um, I'm not gonna, you know, pour it on here right now, but there are certain things that, you know, we as behavior professionals might focus in on, um, in terms of bouncing back from those really, really challenging behaviors because they happen. Um, and so I think it just makes it all the more important for us to be proactive in our profession.

Nicole-Absolutely. I will have a ton of resources linked. I will link all three books that Jenny talked about as well as I know I have some guided journals that I've really benefited from. We'll pull together some resources, but all those in the show notes for you guys to check out and thank you so much for coming on the podcast!

Jenny-Thanks for having me!